Chapter 4- Section 3

Manufactured cloth was almost unattainable here at an early day and the settlers had to depend upon themselves for materials with which they could be comfortably clothed.

The dress of the pioneer men consisted of a fur cap, moccasins, pants and a fringed hunting shirt. The favorite material of a hunters or rangers suit was deer skin, as it was best prepared to stand the rough usage to which it was subjected, and many families from the oldest to the youngest were thus clad. A suit made of it would last a long time and the styles did not change then as now. Great skill was attained in making the deer skin soft and pliable as fine cloth. Nearly all the cloth worn in the families of the early settlers was made at home by the wives and daughters. A neat fitting deer skin or homespun dress and close fitting moccasins made a pretty costume.

The wool was sheared generally by the boys and girls, and carded spun, dyed and woven at home. The cutting out and the sewing were done on the family hearth; stout heavy jeans for the men and a lighter article of linsey for the women. Both had cotton warp. Each family knit their stockings and socks of yarn. Every female practiced the art. All wool blankets were made in quantities and of superior quality. The little spinning wheel produced the thread for sewing and weaving linen. Stout "tow-linen" was woven for shirts and quantities of toweling and sheeting were made also. There are many beautiful coverlets of intricate design made by the pioneer women, in the county that have been handed down through the generations.

Jan 17, 1940

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Pocahontas

Chapter 4--Sec. 3

The early pioneers were essentially self-sustaining, but the climate was such that the killing frosts early and late made the working of land a precarious source of subsistence until a comparatively recent period in the history of our county. As late as 1810, the fact that corn would ripen at Marlin's Bottom enough to be fit for meal was nearly a year's wonder. Gardens for onions, cucumbers, parsnips, pumpkins and turnips; patches for buckwheat, corn, beans and potatoes, for many years comprised most of the pioneers farming enterprise in the way of supplementing their supply of game and fish. The implements used for clearing and cultivating these gardens were of home manufacture and for the most part rather rudely constructed.

The people were very frequently molested when at work by the Indians. On this account the men would carry their guns with them and have them always within ready reach.

It was scarcely possible to keep a work horse because of the raiding Indians, so most of the labor of farming had to be done with hoes. When horses and oxen could be kept and used, plows were in demand. The first plows were made entirely of seasoned hardwood. An improvement was made by attaching an iron plate to the plowing beam. To smooth and pulverize the earth for planting, the place of the harrow was supplied by a crabapple tree or a black thorn bush, pressed down by heavy pieces of wood fastened on by hickory withes or strips of leatherbark. The first harrows that superseded the crab and blackthorn, had wooden

frames shaped like a big A, the teeth being made of seasoned hickory or white oak.

The first scythes that were used to cut the meadows were hand-made by the neighborhood blacksmith, and were hammered out instead of whetted to put them in cutting order.

For handling hay or grain, forks were used made of bifurcated saplings of maple or dogwood, carefully peeled and well-seasoned.

When the pioneer came to need more land than mere patches, he would chop three or four acres of trees and then a log rolling was in order. By invitation the neighbors for miles would meet with their teams of horses or oxen and assist in putting up logheaps for burning. When this was done, a feast was enjoyed and all would return home.

It was an essential matter that about everything needed for use arounnd the home be home-made or at least made somewhere in the immediate neighborhood. The pioneer wives and daughters were exceedingly skillful with their hands. Nearly every household that made any pretense of thrift had a loom, spinning wheels, little and big, a flax breaker, sheep shears, wool cards, and everything needed to change wool and flax into clothing and blankets.

Sheep were raised on the farms and were easily sheared by the girls and boys. The wives and daughters would scour, card, spin, weave and knit the fleeces into clothing.

The flax was grown in the flax patch, usually a choice bit of ground. When ripe, the flax was pulled by hand, spread

in layers, there it lay upon the ground until dry. After the flax had gone through all the processes the finer fiber was spun into finer fabrics and the coarse fiber spun into coarse fabrics.

The growing of wheat in Pocahontas County in quantities surficient for self-support was not thought of in early times. Ploughed in with the bull tongue or shovel plow, brushed over by a crab bush or thorn sapling, and in many instances laboriously dug in with a hoe, it was a precarious crop, owing to freezing out, blight or rust. The harvests were gathered with a sickle. The value of one bushel of wheat was equivalent to two bushels of corn and exchanges were made in that ratio.

At first the horse tramping out was the manner in which the wheat was threshed. Where the crops were comparatively large flailing was superseded by tramping out by horses freshly shod. In this the half grown boy was much in demand as he could ride one horse and lead another. Two or three pairs of horses would hull out forty or fifty bushels of grain a day. After tramping a while the horses would leave the floor and rest while the straw would be shaken up and turned over, and then the tramping would be resumed until the grain was all out.

In separating the wheat from the chaff the first method was to throw shovelfuls up when the wind was high to blow the chaff away, and then the wheat was cleaned by a coarse sieve, which was shaken by hand, and the chaff would come to the top and be raked off in handfuls. This was improved on the "winnowing sheet", usually worked by two men, while a third would shake the wheat from a shallow basket. Finally the "winnowing sheet"

gave way to the windmill or wheat fan, when the farmers became so advanced in circumstances as to feel able to pay thirty or forty dollars for one.

The first threshing machine or "chaff-piler" as it was called, was introduced about 1839 by Wm. Gibson of Huntersville. It was operated by Jesse Whitmer and John Galford, late of Mill Point. It was a small affair, simply a threshing cylinder in a box, propelled by four horses. When in operation the wheat would fly high and low as if all in fun. An immense sheet was spread on the ground, and this was enclosed by a wall of strong tent about eight feet high, on three sides. A person with a rake removed the straw as it came out. He would have his face protected with heavy cloth, for the wheat grains would sting. After the "chaff piler" came the separator, at first propelled by horses and then later by steam.

When it came to be possible to raise corn fit to eat in the limits of our county, its preparation for the table was of the greatest importance. One of the earliest contrivances was a hominy block". This was made from a large block of some hard wood, hollowed out at one end by burning. The top was large but it narrowed down in a funnel shape and held a peck or more of grain. Pounding corn for a family of eight or ten persons was an all day business and half of the night on Saturdays. After pounding, the grain was run through a sieve made of perforated deer's skin. The fine grain was used for "johnny cake" and for bread while the cosrse could either be repounded or cooked as it was for hominy.